

On a dark desert highway, cool wind in my hair...

Who can forget those famous words and memories of the seventies? The seventies saw the introduction of the PC, Star Wars, the contraceptive pill, the Iranian revolution, and the cold war. In the words of Charles Dickens, it was the best of times, it was the worst of times, as established institutions such as family, religion, trust, monogamy, and government continued to loose ground. There was a fundamental shift away from everything that was 'standard'.

It was also a time of high oil prices, a sluggish economy, unemployment, persistent inflation, an unpopular president, and the Eagles were out on tour. Deja vu?

Three decades later, we are witnessing a re-run of some sorts, as iPods, Viagra, Wall-E and geo-political tensions in the Middle-East are causing global anxieties. While the line-up of usual suspects is long, including a restless generation looking for change they can believe in, the rise of fundamental extremism, and the Eagles who are on tour again, oil seems to be a leading actor in both casts.

Conjuring up images of the past, economic slowdown, unemployment and inflation have been slivering like a three-headed snake for over a year now. Gross domestic product has expanded by less than 2%, and according to different studies, will not improve in the short to mid-term. The economy shed almost half-a-million jobs in the first six months of the year, with the official unemployment rate and inflation numbers hovering around 5%. Add the slump-

ing house market, credit crunches, skyrocketing utility prices, bleak job prospects, and increasing corporate profit losses of over a trillion dollars, and images of Medusa start appearing. While this situation is nowhere close to the stagflation numbers of the 1970s, the sentiments of consumers beg to differ.

indicate that they are experiencing challenges in securing their job, and more than half of consumers say they can no longer keep up with the current gas prices. The fact that in recent months over twenty-five million more bikes were sold in the United States should be a clear and present indicator that consumers are seeking alternatives, and may even become healthier due to selective eating and exercise – a recession may not be that bad after all.

Nevertheless, current economic conditions and future prospects are leaving consumers gloomy, sending confidence and sentiments to the lowest level in over two decades, dropping with an average of 30% over the past eighteen months. Cutting back on spending, slicing budgets and adjusting lifestyles are buzzing like crazy.

Yet, unlike previous generations and times in which consumers would leap-frog into extremes by 'lifestyle liposuction', including canceling vacations or selling their car, they have becoming smarter, more adaptable, and are adjusting leisure patterns, rather than simply canceling orders.

While some may indeed re-focus their expectations and plans, many more are realizing that little things matter. Examples abound from kicking the daily soda, saving over \$150 a month, to brewing your own

A homemade lunch with items purchased from the supermarket



One-quarter pound turkey: **\$1.99**
 One-eighth pound Swiss cheese: **\$1**
 Two slices of whole-wheat bread: **28 cents**
 Tomato: 38 cents; lettuce: **20 cent**
 Chips: **30 cents**
 20 oz. soda: **\$1.09**
Total: \$5.24

Recent surveys indicate that over 75% of Americans are facing some sort of challenge due to current economic conditions. One in every four consumer has problems paying for credit, loans, health care, and groceries. Almost a third of consumers